

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
BOARD OF EDUCATION
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

MINUTES:
COMMITTEE TO IMPLEMENT THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

September 4, 2002

Members of the Committee to Implement the No child Left Behind Act met on September 4, 2002, in Senate Room B of the General Assembly Building, Richmond, Virginia, with the following members present:

Mr. Mark C. Christie, chair
Mrs. Susan L. Genovese
Mrs. Audrey B. Davidson
Mr. Mark E. Emblidge

Dr. Jo Lynne DeMary, Superintendent of Public Instruction

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Christie, chairman, at 10:00 AM. Mr. Christie opened the meeting by stating that the Board of Education will undertake a major study of early reading instruction in Virginia's public schools and develop an action plan to improve the reading skills of Virginia school children, especially those who are failing state reading tests.

Mr. Christie emphasized that the goal of the study is to raise substantially the percentage of children in elementary school who attain sufficient reading skills to be successful in school and later in life. The No Child Left Behind Committee develop a plan to implement the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which requires annual testing in reading in grades 3 through 8 beginning in the 2005-06 school year. Mr. Christie said that during the study phase of the initiative, the committee will examine several important issues that affect reading, including such topics as teacher training programs, effective teaching methods, and Virginia's licensing requirements for elementary-school teachers. Mr. Christie stated that this study and plan will bring together all the elements that affect the quality of early reading instruction in the commonwealth.

Preparation for the Teaching of Reading in Virginia Schools

Dr. Shelley Loving-Ryder, assistant superintendent for assessment and reporting at the Department of Education, presented information on reading test scores in Virginia. Test score information included the scores for the Literacy Passport test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and the Standards of Learning. The Literacy Passport test evaluates students' reading comprehension of non-fiction material. The NAEP measures students' proficiency levels in various subjects including reading and mathematics. Dr. DeMary commented that Virginia is not seeing an increase in test scores and proficiency levels that should be expected given the amount of work being done to help students improve in the area of reading.

Dr. Marcia Invernizzi from the University of Virginia presented information on the use of the PALS evaluation as part of the Early Reading Initiative. Dr. Invernizzi indicated that Virginia is one of the first states in the nation to collect reading data. Currently, data is being collected from 96 percent of school divisions using a secure Internet database. She also indicated that participation in the reading initiative was voluntary and that 670,000 scores have been reported. Dr. Invernizzi stated that the Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI) is aligned with the Standards of Learning, the Reading First Initiative, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Dr. Reid Lyon presented information on early childhood reading. Dr. Lyon stated that teachers must know how children learn to read, i.e., the skills, abilities, and environment that produce reading behavior. He indicated that poverty is the biggest risk factor for children when learning to read. In determining what it takes for children to learn to read, Dr. Lyon stated that factors such as a child's home environment, the parents' level of education, the number of books in the home, and how often parents read to the child are issues that must be considered. Children with educated parents may learn up to nine new words a day in contrast to children with less educated parents who may only learn three new words a day. Dr. Lyon stated that for pre-literacy development phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and comprehension strategies are crucial.

The afternoon session involved two panel presentations on reading preparation in four-year undergraduate programs, and five-year graduate programs. Panel members consisted of professors and deans of education from colleges and universities across Virginia. The presentations were followed by questions and comments from board members. A number of professors, representing other institutions of higher education, were invited to share further comments regarding reading preparation programs.

Reading success was clearly recognized as critical to children's overall success in life and reflected in the comparable reading preparation course descriptions that colleges and universities require of their students. Most colleges and universities offer between six to nine hours of reading preparation including practicum experiences. Courses encompass instructional experiences structured around phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension strategies all within rich and varied texts designed to actively engage the reader. Course work also includes training in a variety of assessment strategies that are taught as tools to make informed instructional decisions about students' academic achievement.

Professors discussed the complex nature of reading development and instruction within the equally complex nature of classroom environments. Faced with program time constraints typically consisting of 24 total credit hours, colleges grapple with providing an appropriate number of hours in reading while maintaining a balance of the additional courses also important to teacher preparation. Furthermore, the successful adaptation of students from college teacher preparation programs into classroom environments as professional teachers requires additional collaborative planning among colleges and local school divisions.

Reading First

Linda Poorbaugh, director of elementary programs at the Department of Education, presented information on the status of the Reading First application, currently under review by the USDOE. Mrs. Poorbaugh pointed out the sections of Virginia's application that were being expanded in response to questions arising from the USDOE's review process. The information

requested by the USDOE is being prepared by the Virginia Department of Education staff and will be submitted by the end of the coming week. Dr. DeMary indicated that no substantive changes were made in the programmatic components of the application. Dr. DeMary will give a full status report to the full Board at its meeting on September 26, 2002. Mrs. Genovese moved that the changes as requested by the USDOE and as described by Mrs. Poorbaugh be made in Virginia's application. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously by the committee.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the committee meeting was adjourned at 4:35 PM.

Submitted by Margaret Roberts